

Through a week of seminars and rap sessions

# High schoolers make Washington a classroom

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## Washington

Thousands of students come to Washington each year. For six weeks in the winter, some 400 a week come under the auspices of A Presidential Classroom for Young Americans.

These youngsters don't represent the "average" young American. Selected by their high schools to attend the program, they are student council presidents, school newspaper editors, cheerleaders, varsity athletes, debators, and honor students. They come together to learn not only from political veterans in the national capital, but from each other.

Holly Hughes, on the staff of the Presidential Classroom, has this to say about these eager kids:

"Political ambitions were fired by the students' contact with people in power. Would-be presidents assembled their future Cabinets from among new friends, while hopeful senatorial candidates hatched coalitions and plotted bills to present in 21st-century congresses.

## Goals expand

"One boy, who began the week with the settled intention of becoming secretary of state, added the alternative of becoming director of the CIA after the students had their briefing at CIA headquarters on Tuesday, and after meeting with Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart later in the week he admitted that becoming a Supreme Court Justice was also on his list of goals."

Now in its 10th year, A Presidential Classroom for Young Americans has witnessed a change in attitudes among high school students. Angie Whitaker, who has been the program's Executive Director since 1972, remarks that the 1978 students were still concerned, but

less issue-oriented than their counterparts eight years ago when she first came to work for the classroom. Racial tension and antagonism to the military establishment, the legacy of late-'60s campus unrest, characterized the mood of the high schoolers of the early '70s; now the mood is more relaxed.

The keystone of the program's academic structure is a series of 16 seminars, with Washington observers and officials acting as guest speakers and then fielding questions from the student audience in an extended press-conference-style discussion panel. More often than not, the students confronted those speakers with informed and provocative questions.

## Rap sessions followed

In a Department of Justice seminar, Acting Deputy Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti flashed a humorous smile as his sixth questioner from Philadelphia stepped up to the mi-

crophone, and Mr. Civiletti said, "I think I can guess what your question will be about." Carefully, he proceeded to defend the Justice Department's actions in the Marston case.

Seminars provided information and stimulation, but the fermentation of new ideas in the students' minds occurred in formal and informal discussion groups. Prescribed topics were pushed aside as the students delved into those topics that were uppermost in their minds — abortion, women's rights, drug abuse, religion.

Holly Hughes concluded: "Often the discussions spilled over into late-night rap sessions between roommates. Recurrent topics surfaced in seminar after seminar during a given week, as, for instance, when the CIA and news media and foreign ambassador speakers were all questioned about the use of foreign correspondents for intelligence purposes. Clearly, the students were building a body of thought, and struggling toward a solution."